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ABSTRACT

For the first time, a state has developed standards for noncredit continuing education. The model developed by the state of Ohio measures achievement in terms of goals and objectives rather than in terms of fixed characteristics. It also emphasized institutional self-study and self-assessment. The standards are intended to enable noncredit continuing education programs to maintain their strengths while at the same time, they help establish a systematic process for quality assurance. The standards are intended to apply to three major categories of noncredit programs: (1) skill training and development, (2) professional updating and inservice education, and (3) intellectual development of the individual. This document contains three parts. In part I, the Standards are presented in seven categories: mission; organization/administration/personnel; instructional personnel; resources and facilities; educational offerings; recruitment, admissions, and student services; and program evaluation. In part II, questions to consider for self-study are presented in each of the seven categories. These questions are not meant to be exhaustive, but are meant to amplify the standards and to stimulate the self-study process. Finally, recommendations for implementing the standards are presented in part III. (KC)

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STANDARDS FOR NONCREDIT CONTINUING EDUCATION

OHIO BOARD OF REGENTS

TASK FORCE ON QUALITY STANDARDS FOR

NONCREDIT CONTINUING EDUCATION

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Preface

To the best of our knowledge, Ohio is the first state to develop standards for noncredit continuing education. A concern about standards was expressed by continuing educators at an Ohio Board of Regents Conference held at Cleveland State University in the summer of 1982.

Their concern and their interest in developing written standards led to the formation of the "Task Force on Quality Standards for Noncredit Continuing Education." The Task Force was convened by Ohio Board of Regents Chancellor Edward Q. Moulton on November 4, 1982.

In his opening remarks to the Task Force, Dr. Moulton said that noncredit continuing education has a serious image problem because it does not have written standards. Nor, according to Dr. Moulton, does noncredit continuing education have a systematic method for measuring quality, ". . .even though it has been, and is largely congruent with, the mission, expertise, quality, and competence of the institution offering the noncredit program." Dr. Moulton went on to say, "The challenge ahead is a difficult one. You must deal with the heterogeneity of continuing education."

The Task Force established two goals at that first meeting:

1. To develop noncredit continuing education standards for use by Ohio's colleges and universities; and
2. To formulate recommendations for implementing the standards.

In the months that followed, the Task Force reviewed the literature, studied standards of regional and specialized accrediting associations, surveyed educators, prepared position papers, discussed, debated, and wrote. The challenge was indeed difficult, but the result of their work is in your hands.

The "Standards" developed by the Task Force are a significant forward step for at least three reasons:

1. They serve as a foundation for ongoing standards development;
2. They are grounded in an understanding of the unique characteristics of noncredit education; and
3. They can serve as a basis for self-study, improvement, and quality assurance.

The worth of these "Standards" should not be determined by a consensus of educators who recognize their inherent goodness. They should be evaluated in terms of their usefulness to Ohio's colleges and universities. Ultimately, they must be evaluated on their ability to stimulate educational quality and program integrity and to foster student learning.

The most difficult challenges are yet before us.

Ferris F. Anthony, Chair
Task Force on Quality
Standards for Noncredit
Continuing Education

Introduction

The "Standards" developed by the OBOR Task Force follow closely the mission-objective model first developed by the North Central Association in the 1930's. That model measures achievement in terms of goals and objectives rather than in terms of fixed characteristics. It also emphasizes institutional self-study and self-assessment.

The Task Force also recognizes that noncredit continuing education is pluralistic; it is practiced differently at different institutions. Yet instead of focusing on differences of institutional practice, the "Standards" seek to establish common grounds on which to build educational quality.

When properly viewed, the "Standards" enable noncredit continuing education programs to maintain their particular strengths, such as flexibility, responsiveness to the community, and cross-disciplinary packaging. At the same time, they help establish a systematic process for quality assurance, a process which is not enmeshed in cumbersome procedures.

The emphasis here is on self-study and assessment. The "Standards" must be adapted by colleges and universities to their particular noncredit offerings and to the community they serve. The Task Force believes that quality control must lie with continuing educators and their institutions.

Purposes and Use of the Standards

The "Standards" serve at least five purposes:

1. They provide institutions with a basis for self-study and assessment;
2. They serve as minimum criteria for the development of noncredit programs;
3. They provide criteria by which the public can identify quality noncredit programs;

4. They enable continuing education agencies to identify themselves as having met professionally accepted standards; and

5. They serve as a foundation for the on-going development of noncredit program standards and processes of quality assurance.

The "Standards" are intended to apply to three major categories of noncredit programs:*

1. Skill Training and Development;

2. Professional Updating and Inservice Education; and

3. Intellectual Development of the Individual.

The Standards

In Part I, the "Standards" are presented in seven categories: Mission; Organization/Administration/Personnel; Instructional Personnel; Resources and Facilities; Educational Offerings; Recruitment, Admissions and Student Services; and Program Evaluation.

In Part II, questions to consider for self-study are presented in each of the seven categories. These questions are certainly not exhaustive; they are meant to amplify on the "Standards" and to stimulate the self-study process.

Finally, recommendations for implementing "Standards" are presented in Part III.

*Although the "Standards" may be applied to a number of noncredit program categories, including for example, recreation-leisure programs and community service programs, the Task Force focused on the three program categories listed. It is hoped that standards for other noncredit program categories will be developed in the near future.

PART I: STANDARDS FOR NONCREDIT CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAMS

I. Mission (Goals, Objectives, Functions)

A. The educational mission of the sponsoring institution must be clearly stated, and the goals, objectives, and functions of continuing education must be consistent with that mission.

B. Continuing education programs must be consistent with the institution's educational functions, resources, and expertise.

II. Organization/Administration/Personnel

A. A recognizable organization, with clearly defined purposes, must be in operation to design, approve, administer, and assess continuing education programs.

B. Continuing education must be administered within the sponsoring institution to ensure that all programs are organized and coordinated in an effective manner.

III. Instructional Personnel

A. Continuing education faculty must be competent to carry out the level of instruction to which they are assigned and should possess academic preparation and/or expertise appropriate to the fields taught.

B. Specific criteria and a systematic process must be identified for the selection and evaluation of faculty for continuing education programs.

C. Experience in teaching adults, in addition to subject matter competence, must be required of noncredit faculty.

IV. Resources and Facilities

The institution must provide resources and facilities to enable continuing education to meet its goals and objectives.

V. Educational Offerings

A. Continuing education offerings must be organized learning experiences designed to meet specific learning objectives.

B. Continuing education offerings must specify the clientele, the competencies, the prerequisites, the content, and the instructional and evaluation strategies.

C. Course description and syllabi must be on file and accessible by the public.

D. Students must have an opportunity to evaluate continuing education offerings, including an evaluation of goals, objectives, content, and instruction.

VI. Recruitment, Admissions, and Student Services

A. Continuing education promotional materials must be accurate and must provide students with specific information about the program, the topics, the benefits, and the completion requirements.

B. Institutional continuing education policies, including fee schedule, refund schedule, program cancellation, record maintenance, and student services must be readily available to students.

VII. Program Evaluation

A. Continuing education must engage in a continuous review of its organization, administration, and offerings through the interrelation of the curricula, faculty, students, professional organizations, and other available resources.

B. The results of the evaluation must be used to modify and improve continuing education.

C. Continuing education must have plans for the long-range development of its organization and offerings; these plans must be part of a design for total institutional development.

PART II: QUESTIONS FOR INSTITUTIONAL SELF-STUDY

I. Mission (Goals, Objectives, Functions)

A. Are the goals, objectives, and functions of continuing education consistent with the mission of the institution?

B. Are the continuing education offerings appropriate to post-secondary education?

C. Are program offerings related to the goals, objectives, and functions of continuing education?

II. Organization/Administration/Personnel

A. Is continuing education organized in a clear, well-defined manner consistent with its stated goals, objectives, and functions?

B. Does the continuing education organization function as depicted in the organizational chart of the institution?

C. Is continuing education administered in an efficient and effective manner?

D. Does the continuing education staff possess the necessary professional competencies to carry out their assigned responsibilities?

E. Are continuing education policies clearly stated and communicated throughout the institution?

III. Instructional Personnel

A. Do specific written policies exist for the identification, selection, employment and evaluation of continuing education faculty?

B. Are specific personnel policies clearly stated and communicated to continuing education faculty?

C. Is there a reasonable relationship between the number and diversity of instructional offerings and the size and diversity of continuing education faculty?

IV. Resources and Facilities

A. Are appropriate and adequate administrative facilities and services available for continuing education?

B. Are appropriate and adequate instructional facilities and equipment, including laboratories, computer, and library facilities, available for continuing education offerings?

C. Are learning resources and support services, e.g., audio-visuals, available to continuing education faculty?

V. Educational Offerings

A. What rationale is used to determine what is to be offered?

B. Is there evidence of a systematic process for proposing, approving, and implementing continuing education offerings?

C. Is a syllabus developed for each continuing education offering?

D. Do offerings include statements of purpose and objectives?

E. Is a file maintained for each offering, including syllabus, handout materials, and instructor of record?

F. Is the content of each offering selected and organized in accordance with recognized principles of adult teaching and learning?

G. Is there evidence that offerings are preplanned, including opportunities for input by faculty, continuing education personnel, and target clientele?

H. Are systematic methods used to measure student performance?

VI. Recruitment, Admissions, and Student Services

A. Is informational and promotional material about continuing education offerings accurate? Does it provide students with details about the nature of the offerings, the topics to be treated, the objectives to be achieved, and the necessary prerequisites?

B. Are written policies regarding fees, refunds, cancellations, CEU's, registration, certificates, and maintenance of records available to students?

C. Are attendance records maintained to verify student participation in continuing education offerings?

D. Are permanent student records maintained? Are student records available to students, employers, and others at the request of the student?

E. Are policies on the use of learning resources and availability of student services communicated to continuing education students?

F. Are continuing education staff available to provide information to students?

VII. Program Evaluation

A. Are systematic methods used to measure the effectiveness of continuing education in terms of its stated objectives?

B. Are evaluation results used to modify and improve continuing education offerings?

C. Are evaluation results used in the systematic refinement of the continuing education mission and operation?

PART III: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE STANDARDS

Recognizing that the ultimate responsibility for implementing the "Standards" must lie with continuing educators and with each college and university, the Task Force recommends the following:

1. The Ohio Board of Regents should endorse the "Standards," and should encourage Ohio's colleges and universities to endorse the "Standards" and to implement them in their noncredit programs;

2. The colleges and universities should identify appropriate mechanisms within their organizations to implement the "Standards;"

3. The Ohio Continuing Higher Education Association (OCHEA) should serve as the primary agency for disseminating the "Standards" to member institutions and other interested constituents, and should establish and maintain educational programs to assist institutions who seek to implement the "Standards;" and

4. The Ohio Continuing Higher Education Association should review the "Standards" on a regular basis in order to update and further refine them.